

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

DIALECT TALES.

By SHERWOOD BONNER. Illustrated, pp. 187. Harper & Brothers.

There goes a certain gift to the fit writing of dialect tales, and few there who possess it. Dialects consist of something more than quaint, obsolete and unusual forms of speech. The very survival of a dialect presupposes a conservative habit of social existence which is favorable to the production of a peculiar local way of looking at things, and an equally peculiar local wit and humor. To catch and preserve these latter characteristics is difficult, save for the observer who has the subtle faculty of intuition, and who can create harmonious characters as the masters of fiction have done; characters which, when thus created, do say things which are sometimes quite as surprising to the author as if they had been living people. The translation of ordinary educated thought into dialect must necessarily fail to produce the desired effect. There has been a good deal of that kind of spurious dialect writing attempted of late, however, and some authors have thought that all that was necessary to convert dulness into wit was to print it in bad English.

The dialect tales of Sherwood Bonner occupy a half-way position. They are as genuine as those of Mr. Harris, for example, but they are much better than many other attempts in the same field. In some of them one meets what can only be called translations of ordinary talk. Occasionally words are encountered which are clearly out of place, as for instance when an ignorant Western woman is made to speak of "the porcy" (meaning paucity) of something. Such a word as paucity, of course, has no business in the vocabulary of a prairie cabin. The author, moreover, had not the faculty of giving life to her characters, or individuality, save in exceptional instances. The Southern negro dialect is the best in the book, but even that is often strained. Of course, too, a dialect tale to be interesting must be first a good story and then a dialect story. More specimens of dialect will not add to poverty of dramatic imagination. For the most part the action in these stories is of the lightest. They are indeed little more than sketches, and had they been written without the dialect many of them would have had but a poor excuse for existence. The first one, "The Gentlemen of Sarsar," is decidedly the poorest in the collection. One of the best is "The Bean Dance at the Apple Settlement." Of the rest one or two are little more than burlesques, while in nearly all there is a notable failure to reproduce the idiomatic turns of thought which appear so naturally and abundantly in Mr. Harris's negro stories, and of which some striking illustrations are to be found in the series of the Tennessee Mountains recently published in book form.

To write dialect well the life of those who speak it should have been lived, and their mental habits carefully and appreciatively studied. It is not, therefore, a kind of work upon which inexperienced writers should experiment. When it is well done it involves the full exercise of powers which may be expected to produce really important fiction. When it is not well done it results in a more than commonly depressing failure.

A writer, however, had some, but not enough, fitness for the work. Her stories passed in magazine form, but it may be doubted whether their perpetuation was altogether judicious. The illustrations point and increase the interest of the narrative instances, when the fact itself is rather dull. The general effect is not particularly improved by the artist's efforts. As specimens of dialect tales, in short, these will not sustain a serious criticism, though as light and clever outline sketches they are not undeserving of praise.

LISE FLEURON. Par Georges CONNET. Paris: Paul Ollendorff. New-York: Brentano, pp. 363.

A new novel by the author of "The Forge Master" and "A娥 Paname," something of a literary event in Paris, but if "Lise Fleuron" adds to the reputation of the author in his own country it will hardly do so here. It is always difficult to deal with French novels, for even when there has been an evident effort to keep them on a higher ethical plane than that of Zola and his school, they are nevertheless apt to hover between tawdry sentimentality and veiled lasciviousness. M. Obert has in "Lise Fleuron" attempted to present what may be assumed to be his ideal of a perfectly virtuous and high-minded young girl; and his model is an actress with but one lover. The action is almost confined to the theatre. There is a speciousness of dialect, in short, these will not sustain a serious criticism, though as light and clever outline sketches they are not undeserving of praise.

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MRS. GALLAHER. French Protestant Boarding and Day School for Young Girls, 45 Madison Avenue, New York. For application, see above.

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